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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, December 23, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS ODDS AND ENDS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, and the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Last week one day we discussed the matter of making Christmas trees and greens last. Now I have a few more ideas on the subject from the Department of Agriculture tree-men. They tell me that if you set a tree in water when it first comes in the house, and then if you keep it in water while it is part of the Christmas decoration, it will stay fresh and green for at least a week longer. Of course, you'll want to replace the water as it evaporates.

Then if you trim the base of the tree with a sharp knife just before mounting it, that will open the pores and let the water rise in the stem to the living cells that are still trying to provide the tree with food and moisture. And remember that a tree lasts longer in a cool room than in one that is overheated.

Now for a few other ideas which I have collected here and there from the Department of Agriculture. Here's one about using vegetables as table and window decorations.

We have always looked to fruits and flowers and greens as the material for table and home decorations. Just why we housewives haven't appreciated the decorative qualities of our garden vegetables, I don't know. Certainly our vegetables are just as beautiful in color and often in shape. Think of the rich purple of the eggplant, the brilliant orange of carrots, the white and green of celery and parsley, the brilliant red of radishes. Well, for a novel Christmas dinner table decoration here's an idea. Place in the very center of the table a plain wooden bowl or some other simple container to hold some of the larger vegetables like an acorn squash or a small perfect head of cauliflower. Then arrange around this center other vegetables, scrubbed until they shine -- other vegetables that will carry out the red and green and white color scheme as much as possible. Possibilities are broccoli, fresh wax beans, white onions, red beets, red radishes and white onions. Parsley will give a soft green effect.

Somebody told me the other day of a clever Vermont housewife who made window wreaths of colorful vegetables as an unusual Christmas decoration. She washed and scrubbed some bright carrots, warm red beets, and purple-topped parsnips and wired these on a hoop along with some silvery onions. As the green background for the wreath she used carrot tops and parsley. Of course, the wreath only lasted a day or two, but it made a lovely cheerful decoration as long as it lasted.

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And speaking of wreaths and other window decorations reminds me that we housewives especially owe a big debt of gratitude to our modern windows. And Christmas decorations might be considered one way of showing the appreciation that windows deserve as the bringers of light and cheer to our homes. Not so very long ago families had to do without windows except those of the most meager sort. In the early days of Merry England and also on the continent window glass was too rare and costly for ordinary use. To be sure, they were making clear glass in those days but only in small pieces, and carefully fitted it together to go into the windows of the great cathedrals. But for private houses it was far too expensive. The best most homes could afford was a little bit of coarse, greenish cloudy glass, but even this was too expensive for a good-sized window. To add to other expenses, governments in those days levied taxes on windows. So most homes got along with small peepholes covered with thin plates of mica or horn or oiled canvas. Most of the openings for air and light had to be closed in winter with shutters and the general practice was to fill the chinks with straw or rags. More recently, there were the homes of the pioneers in our own country that had only oiled paper at the small windows to let in light. Well, I'm just mentioning this because most of us busy housewives fall into the habit of regarding windows as just one more washing chore. As a matter of fact, they are one of our greatest helps toward home cheer and comfort, and deserve to be kept clear and shiny at all times of year.

That reminds me of a Christmas custom from Norway that the children in this country might well adopt. In Norway an important part of the Christmas Eve festival always is the remembering of the birds. Just as the Christmas bells begin to ring, the children go out and tie a bundle of grain on a pole for the birds' feast in the morning. If you have a window box -- an outdoor window box -- you can make that into a bird-feeding station and provide pleasure for the youngsters in the family and the birds outdoors. Let the children set out a few small decorative evergreens in this box. On these little trees, they can tie suet and cranberries and bits of bread or cake, ready for the Christmas feast of the birds who have remained nearby during the winter. A saucer sunk in the soil of the window-box might hold grain or water. This bird-feeding-station is so easy to reach from the window that the children can keep the snow brushed off and the supply of food ready, just by reaching out from indoors. And from indoors, too, they can look out and watch their bird-friends enjoying the feast they have provided.

If the youngsters in your family are interested in building homes for birds, I'd like to suggest a bulletin which they can have just by writing the Department of Agriculture, at Washington, D. C. This is called "Homes for Birds." Its number is 1456. As long as the free supply lasts, you can have a copy of "Homes for Birds."

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